

Affinity

I was an ant, a bee, a fish,
in lives so distant, I forget;
and yet that sense is with me yet --
the insect flesh crushed under my step
has been my own, has been my own --
far back, far back -- and that is why
my heart fails, and my spirit and brain
tighten cold with the ant's pain
when under my careless foot
helpless he lies,
and makes no cry,
but his broken body strains.

The caught fish, gaping, dying, once,
far back, far back, was what I was, and hence
the air that tears him fatally
burns in my lungs with desperate hurt.
In rank, pre-glacial forests, I recall,
the vibrancy of wing in seething sun
and joy's amazing resonance of song,
I suddenly perceived, were mine,
the sound of worship issued from my own throat.
And all that honey stored against the cold
feeds me with patience and with sweetest trust
in life after life, the person sure to last.

GEORGE ABBE